

Tape #77
Interview with Allen Bodenlos
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Transcribed by Jeffrey Rhoten
Checked by

Tape #N77a

00:03

AB: Well it's very simple, as you'll hear.

CD: Alright Allen, whenever you're ready, just a list of your involvement throughout the war.

00:14

AB: Well, right after Pearl and nine months of training I was assigned to Canton Island to build an airfield, airfields. From Canton Island it was island hopping. As soon as the Marines captured a Japanese island we were right there with them clearing off the airfield so our own airplanes could land. Well from Can we went to Tinian, Saipan, Okinawa, Guam, and several of the islands. My last island was Okinawa, toward the end of the war in 1945. And I finally got rest and recuperation from Can- from Okinawa, and on the way home why over the loud speakers came the announcement that the Japanese had surrendered. Well I was scheduled to go back to Okinawa for the invasion of Japan, and at 128 pounds I don't think I would have survived, because uh Commander Fuchida- uh Commander Tibbets who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and uh met with Fuchida, the flight commander of the wing that bombed Pearl Harbor, they met several years after the war and were chatting, and Fuchida told Tibbets, "You did the right thing in dropping that bomb." Why? Because it save a million-and-a-half Japanese civilians; men, women, and children would have been strapped with dynamite, hand grenades, pitch forks, baseball bats. Not only that, the Americans, and maybe me, would have lost a million-and-a-half also.

01:58

CD: What's you're most vivid memory of December 7, 1941?

AB: There were several, but I think the major one was when the Arizona blew up. I looked over there, after of course, a little bit after, and I thought oh my dear friends from the band, and they all went down, 16 members of the band went down with the Arizona that...young people that I had chatted with

02:25

CREW INTERRUPTION FOR SOUND

CD: Okay Allen, just to go back, what was your most vivid memory of that day?

03:13

AB: Uh, of the Arizona blowing up. The concussion- the explosion was so

tremendous, uh the concussion was so great that it knocked us off our feet on the two lane road right across from it. And uh I thought to myself, oh I wonder if any of the band members that I had were acquainted with, especially the trumpet players, survived, but of course they didn't. I was honored later to meet the sis- to get acquainted with the sister of one of the band trumpet players that went down with that band, and she wrote this marvelous book: "Arizona's Last Band." And if you ever get a chance to read that it's a tremendous story. **(04:00)** I have corresponded with her, being a buge- uh trumpet player also, we corresponded for quite a while. I think she has passed away since.

04:14

Crew Talks Off-Camera

04:19

AB: What was really going on that morning as the California started to s- roll over, but they counter-flooded in time and it sank straight down, as did the Tennessee, to the bottom of the harbor, 40 feet. Where were we now, I was ad-libbing...

CD: Could you go back, you're ad-libbing is fine, can you go back and say what's unique about you and what you saw? Why? Just what you were talking about.

04:48

AB: Well as I tell the young people when I go to the schools, and colleges, and universities that I was a soldier. And people say, "Well you were a soldier, what were you doing at Pearl Harbor?" Well that revolves around earlier, when I was a musician and was in Pearl- Honolulu to buy instruments and got stuck at Pearl. There I was watching, like a movie, the complete panorama of Pearl Harbor, from one end to the other, seeing the destruction of not just one ship, or two ships, but all of them, and uh ironic as the Nevada start taking off, this is a cute little story, uh might be - it's interesting to me anyway, the bands were ready to play the national anthem exactly at eight o'clock. Well the attack didn't start at Pearl right at 7:55, **(05:40)** they were at the airfields first to neutralize our air wing, Wheeler, Hickam, and the others. Then they were at Pearl, uh at Pearl Harbor, and right at eight o'clock the Nevada band started playing the national anthem. Well here come the Japanese, swooping down with bullets flying all over. That beloved band director would not stop playing the national anthem until they were through. Not a one of them got hurt. **(06:09)** And I admire him; and I wonder if I would have done the same thing as a band director, heh heh.

06:17

CD: What was your proudest moment that day?

06:20

AB: That I survived I guess, heh heh. I uh, I had no pride in me, just anger, and anguish, and what's happening, and what's going to go on from now on. Funny - not funny, but uh I was actually invited December 7 to go aboard the USS Aylwin uh from a friend from Cleveland that was on the train with me when we went out

to Ford uh...to California. He was in the Navy. He had, we corresponded after I got to Pearl, and he invited me... uh Schofield, and he invited me to come aboard his ship to have breakfast, and church services, and then we would go to Waikiki for fun in the sun, but it never come about. And to this day I don't know what happened to him, you know. **(07:20)** It wasn't sunk or hit real bad, because it was a destroyer uh a ways from battleship row.

07:30

CD: In a few words, in very few words, describe that panoramic scene that you saw at Pearl Harbor that morning.

07:40 CREW INTERRUPTION

08:05

AB: My thoughts at the moment, uh...were anger; what's going on, and what's happening; why are we being attacked; what's the future going to hold?

CD: Can you describe that panoramic scene in a few words? Just what you saw.

08:30

AB: Utter destruction, utter confusion, utter horror. The two lane road in those days was close enough. I and we could all see sailors being blown off their ships, so we were close enough. Of course our chapter in San Diego is basically Navy, about 99% Navy, and the other 1% or 2 are soldiers and marines, (coughs).

CD: Have you been out to the memorial?

09:10

AB: Oh at least 35 times. That's my first duty. When I arrive, the next day I go over to the Arizona to pay my respects and lay my flowers, and then when I come back one of the rangers will take me over to the Utah, where I pay my respects. I'm gonna be scattered at Pearl Harbor when I die, and it will be uh to the stern of the- the bow of the Utah. I desire to be there with my shipmates, and comrades

CD: Why is that-

AB: And that's all arranged.

09:48

CD: Why is that important to you?

AB: I uh, I just want to be around my veterans, that uh we all experienced the same tragedy.

10:04

CD: How'd living through that day change you?

10:10

AB: Well I'm not sure that it really has. I was born and raised a Christian, and I've always been a Christian, so... And uh, I thank the Lord daily for bringing me through that holocaust, and for these 88 years he's given me so far.

10:33

CD: When you stand on that memorial, over that battleship at rest out at Pearl Harbor, what thoughts go through your mind?

10:45

AB: Well I uh, I used to have a little kit about it, I uh... When I'm ready to leave, not only do they take me to the Utah, but I also am taken over to Hospital Point, where the Nevada was. They have a memorial there also. And the Oklahoma Memorial. I go to those four places to pay my respects. When I'm ready to leave the next day, I go out to the Arizona uh to say goodbye to my shipmate, comrades, and buddies down below, and I'll lean over and say, "Hey guys, one of these days this old dog face is going to be down there with you." And I listen, and I hear an, "Oh no..." That's not true of course, but heh heh heh... There's a tremendous story, you may have heard it, about the Utah. You know there's a little baby still down in the Utah. Yeah, you know that story. So I shall be back at the Utah keeping an eye on the - well we all know **(11:54)** that uh our souls go above, and only bones are down below, but I'll be there watching over her, and uh being a comrade of my shipmates, and comrades, and buddies, and friends,

12:10

CD: What ever happened to your band director...what ever happened to those instruments you bought in Honolulu?

12:18

AB: Never got 'em, of course, and even to this day know what happened to my trumpet, uh bugle, uh trump- my trumpet, I had, I brought my trumpet with me when I joined the army. I don't know what happened to it. It was probably in my locker, and I- when I finally got shipped to the islands I uh know not what happened to that locker. But I'm honored when I go to Pearl. My friend, who runs kind of a tour guide international (malconing?) or something, he brings history teachers and high school bands from around the country and he asks me to speak to them about my experience at Pearl Harbor. Well when they find that I had studied music, and played the trumpet, and wanted to be a band director, the band directors will ask me if I'd like to direct their bands, and I've done oh at least ten of them. **(13:07)** Well last, this past memorial day when I was over at Pearl uh at the visitors' center the Navy Band Pacific was playing dawn on the Lani overlooking the Arizona and the Missouri, and I walked right up to them where I was standing, and I said, "Sir, my name is Allen, I'm a Pearl Harbor survivor, and I studied music, I played the trumped, the french horn uh in the band, string bass in the orchestra, studied theory, harmony, I wanted to be a band director, but the Japanese took care of that." And he smiled, handed me his baton **(13:45)** and he said, "Would you like to direct the band?" I was so honored to direct that Navy band, yeah, so I'm looking forward to this November there

might be some bands there.

13:55

CD: What song did you direct that day?

AB: Oh I know the stars and stripes by heart. I don't know what number they were playing, it wasn't stars and stripes, but it was a march, yeah. So that's a dream come true.

14:12

CD: What's the lesson of Pearl Harbor for us today, Allen?

14:15

AB: Well our motto of the Pearl Harbor survivors is, "Remember Pearl Harbor, keep America alert," we mustn't let that happen again, although we didn't start it, uh we can possibly prevent it by diplomacy and uh trying to get along with other countries, uh resolving our problems, talking not shooting at each other.

14:46

CD: Allen is there anything I didn't ask you about your Pearl Harbor experience that you think is important that you would like to share?

15:00

AB: Well most of my friends, uh senior friends, my peers of my age group have passed on. In fact I just lost my buddy who was in the 804th Engineers. Ironically, that morning he was on Canton Island, so although he was in the 804th Engineer Aviation Battallion he was not a Pearl Harbor survivor. But uh after 67 years of being friends here in San Diego he passed away here a month ago, and he was really the last of my peers that I had left. We're all disappearing rapidly. **(15:43)** Pearl Harbor survivors at 55 a month, and under 5000 left.

15:50

CD: Well I'm very happy to do this for the National Parks Service.

AB: Well I'm honored of course, although my experiences at Pearl weren't quite as some of the sailors who were on those ships. Uh I felt a part of them, I felt like I was a sailor for that one hour. And then when I got back to Schofield I was a soldier again. But I never forgot. And I remember the young fellows that I was acquainted with in the various stance bands of the fleet, the battleships.

16:35

CD: Allen thank you very much for your time today.

AB: Well thank you for inviting me. I'm honored, always. I often think my story isn't quite as dramatic as the sailors, but uh...

CD: It's a great perspective.

AB: And some things I forget, then I remember when I get home. That comes with getting older too, heh heh. I couldn't remember the name of the uh repair ship out board of the Arizona...Vestal, the Vestal repair ship was outboard of the Arizona. And it didn't get sunk, but uh it got hit.

CD: Thank you Allen.

17:13

Allen and Chuck discuss the opening of the new memorial.

18:08

ROOM TONE AND INSERT SHOTS

23:35

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape continues with another interview